

CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES

DELEGATION OFFICE
STATE OF NEW MEXICO
HART SENATE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20510
(202) 224-3330

July 1, 2010

The Honorable Harris Sherman
Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment
US Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Mr. Sherman:

We are writing in strong support of the proposal submitted by the Santa Fe National Forest in New Mexico for the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP), entitled, "*The Southwest Jemez Mountains Forest Landscape Restoration Project*." The Forest applied for this program under the Forest Landscape Restoration Act, and, with CFLRP funding, proposes to conduct a large-scale landscape restoration within the Jemez Mountains in northern New Mexico during the next 10 years. We were very pleased to learn that the Jemez Mountains proposal was listed as the top-scoring, #1 priority for CFLRP projects in the Forest Service's Southwest Region 3 when submitted to the USFS Washington Office.

As you are aware, many of New Mexico's watersheds on national forests have supported intensive human use for centuries, but are now being transformed by climate warming, catastrophic forest fire, soil erosion, housing developments in the wildland-urban interface, and invasive species. These changes have threatened watershed function and the "ecosystem services" they provide and have had cascading effects on New Mexico's quality of life, socio-economic activities, and future development. While these issues occur to varying degrees throughout New Mexico, the need for watershed restoration is particularly acute in the Jemez Mountains of northern New Mexico. As demonstrated by the Cerro Grande fire ten years ago, the Jemez Mountain's forests are under continual threat of catastrophic wildfire, and are in dire need of accelerated restoration. In addition, this mountain range, at the southern extreme of the Rocky Mountains, has been identified in repeated studies as being extremely sensitive to climate change, and may be one of the first mountain ranges to lose its winter snowpack under future climate warming projections.

In response to the growing need for action, a large and diverse group of people and organizations has come together to develop a Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Project for the Jemez Mountains. Under this collaborative project these groups will work together in the coming decade to reduce potential catastrophic wildfires by thinning second-growth "dog hair" forests, thereby setting them on a successional trajectory to old-growth conditions and returning the watersheds to their natural historic fire cycles. The team also will undertake riparian restoration

projects, reintroducing willows and stabilizing streambanks to provide water quality improvements and increase habitat for stream and riparian wildlife species, while controlling non-native species.

Another important phase of the project will be the extensive collection and application of scientific data in planning, implementing and monitoring the project's on-the-ground actions. Science-based adaptive management, utilizing a network of replicated monitoring sites with appropriate statistical control plots, will be employed to maximize effectiveness and efficiency throughout the project, and provide both land managers and the public with up-to-date information on the measured impacts of watershed restoration.

The entire program also will provide a vast array of educational opportunities for students and the general public, supported through the Valles Caldera's Science and Education Center in Jemez Springs. This public education program will considerably enhance knowledge of the natural and cultural resources of northern New Mexico, and will offer both formal and informal educational programs to recruit young men and women into training programs for land management through New Mexico's colleges and universities.

When the project is completed, the threats to the watersheds of the Jemez Mountains will be substantially reduced, creating the prospect for a more sustainable future of our natural and cultural resources on forested public lands in northern New Mexico. When successful, this collaborative model may be replicated in community watersheds throughout New Mexico and the arid Southwest.

Thank you for your consideration of this proposal, and we will look forward to learning of the results and recommendations of the proposal review panel later this summer.

Sincerely,



Jeff Bingaman
United States Senator



Tom Udall
United States Senator



Martin Heinrich
United States Representative



Ben Ray Luján
United States Representative



Harry Teague
United States Representative